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DRAGAGES - A HUNDRED YEARS OF ACTIVITY IN ASIA



1902: Founding in Vietnam

During the last 100 years, Dragages has been involved in constant activity in Asia, leaving its signature on the infrastructure and skylines of many countries in the region.

When the company was founded in Vietnam in 1902 (as Société Française Industrielle D'Extreme-Orient), it undertook its first project, the dredging and maintenance of a 2,000 kilometre canal system in the Mekong Delta, establishing a pioneering tradition which remains in the veins of the company today.

In 1910 its name changed to Société Française D'Entreprises de Dragages et de Travaux Publics (SFEDTP) and during the next three decades, it was involved in the development of Vietnam's land and maritime infrastructure as well as the urban modernisation of Hanoi, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh, Dalat and Tourane.

It built the Majestic and Caravelle Hotels and the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank in Ho Chi Minh, and the Credit Foncier in Hanoi. The stylish art deco façade of the Caravelle, Ho Chi Minh's first high rise hotel (10 storeys), which was built in 1956, was considered a masterpiece of its time.

1955 First contract in Hong Kong

In 1955, SFEDTP won its first contract in Hong Kong, the current seat of its Asian headquarters: the reclamation and formation of the run-way at Kai Tak Airport.

This was an enormous project which required filling in approximately 121 hectares of the harbour, ranging in depth from three to 11 metres. To raise the level of the proposed runway to a height of five metres above mean sea level required 8,409,786 cubic metres of fill.

More infrastructure projects in Hong Kong quickly followed including Shek Pik and Plover Cove reservoirs and the first Lion Rock Tunnel. In the 1970s, it built the first container berth at Kwai Chung, tunnels and shafts for the High Island water scheme, the second Lion Rock Tunnel, and stage one of the Tsuen Wan bypass.

The 1970s also saw the start of its involvement in the construction of Hong Kong's MTR system, for which it built the stations at Central, Admiralty, Lok Fu, Kwai Fong, Kwai Hing, Wanchai and Taikoo.

1950s-1980s: Expansion throughout Asia

At the same time, business was being developed in Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand. In Bangkok in the early fifties, it dredged 15 million cubic metres of material to make a sea channel through the Chao Phraya River bar, later building the King Taksin the Great Bridge.

It was also busy in Indonesia where it carried out several marine related projects including a major dam and hydro electric power plant at Djatiluhur on the river Djitarum from 1964-67.

In Cambodia it was responsible for the construction of the 60,000 seat Olympic stadium in Phnom-Penh.

In Malaysia, works in the 1970s and 1980s included two bridges over the Pahang River at at Kuala Lepar and Jerantut, a container berth at Butterworth for the Port of Penang, and the extension of the Port of Kuching.

In 1973 the French company SCREG bought Dragages giving expansion into North and Central America, the Middle East and Africa, and the company continued to develop in Asia: Dragages Singapore was set up in 1984 to built Newton MRT station; in 1986 it completed its first project in China, the extension of Jiuzhou Harbour in Zhuhai province; and in Hong Kong it acted as main sub-contractor for the foundations and sub-structure of the prestigious Sir Norman Foster designed Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank headquarters.

1986: Integration with Bouygues

Then in 1986, SCREG was purchased by the Bouygues Group, a leading French corporation, which is today one of the foremost construction groups in the world.

Whereas Dragages up until now had been active mainly in civil engineering projects, Bouygues brought to Dragages its expertise in building projects.

This immediately bore fruit with the award to Dragages of the contract for Pacific Place Phase II, a prestigious development by Swire Properties in Hong Kong, which included the construction of two luxury hotels as well as offices and service apartments.

By introducing modern methods including top down construction, whereby the superstructure and basements could progress at the same time, and the extensive use of system formwork giving rise to a productivity cycle of one level per four days, the project was completed in only 34 months.

Developing a reputation for innovation and efficiency

The ability of Dragages to undertake complex, fast-track projects was thus

established at Pacific Place II, and it began to develop its reputation as an innovative and highly efficient builder.

Its technical expertise was further demonstrated by the introduction of a launching girder to build the Kwun Tong by-pass in 1989: this was the first use of this method in Hong Kong to build a balanced cantilever bridge out of pre-cast units, and it gave substantial savings in time as well as cost.

The decision by the Hong Kong government to build a new national stadium in 1992 gave Dragages a further opportunity to demonstrate the efficiency of its methods: its alternative proposal for the stadium cut the scheduled construction period from 3 years to 2 years, and also made it possible for the world famous Hong Kong Rugby Sevens Tournament to take place in the middle of construction.

The technical skills of Dragages were also called upon as it led a consortium in 1993 for construction of the foundations and raft of the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, which on completion were designated the tallest structures in the world.

The 1990s - Establishing a quality brand in Singapore

Meanwhile in 1993 Dragages Singapore also won its first contract for a major building project: the prestigious five star Ritz-Carlton Hotel, designed by the architect Kevin Roche (responsible for Challenger, the Bouygues Group's head office situated near Paris, France) which was being developed by Pontiac Marina Pte Ltd.

Alternatives for the detailed design proposed by Dragages improved buildability and efficiency, and led to the company's appointment for two additional projects: the 42-storey office building, Millenia Tower; and the 40,000 sqm Millenia Walk shopping centre.

On the strength of its performance on these projects, Dragages Singapore was awarded a further contract by Pontiac Marina, this time a design and build package, for the 37-storey Centennial Tower.

Both Centennial Tower and the Ritz-Carlton were granted Awards for Construction Excellence by Singapore's Building Construction Authority.

The 1990s - Construction boom in Hong Kong

The construction of the new international airport in Hong Kong brought a large number of new projects, both on the civil and building side, and gave Dragages a further opportunity to demonstrate its skill at large-scale, fast-track projects.

Between 1993 and 1997 it built: the 1.5km Route 3 Cheung Ching Tunnel; the 3.7km Route 3 Tai Lam Tunnel (in JV) ; the Rambler Channel Road Bridge (the first bridge in Hong Kong to feature external pre-stressing);

Rambler Channel Rail Bridge; HAECO's new aircraft base maintenance facility; the largest flight kitchen in the world for Cathay Pacific Catering Services, and the new headquarters complex for Cathay Pacific Airways.

It was also entrusted with the construction (in JV with local company Hip Hing) of a prestigious new landmark building for Hong Kong: the extension to the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Situated on the Hong Kong water-front and with a striking curved roof, designed to look like a bird taking off into flight, the high profile building was chosen as the venue for the Hong Kong Handover Ceremony between China and Great Britain in June 1997. This deadline could not be moved! Needless to say, the building was completed on time, and within budget, in an astonishing 26 months.

The 1990s - First steps into the residential market and a prestigious renovation project in Singapore

The late 1990s saw Dragages' first steps into the market for residential buildings and public housing. In Singapore in 1997 it was awarded its first luxury condominium contract: the Hazel Park development. This was followed by The Floravale, The Sterling, The Equatorial and The Ladyhill, all high quality condominiums.

Its reputation in Singapore as a quality builder was further enhanced by the award of the contract for the renovation of the Fullerton Building and its transformation into a luxury hotel. This Palladian style building was originally built in 1928 to serve as a post office. During the work, its interior was partially demolished and re-built, while some parts were preserved and restored. One Fullerton, a striking modern building situated on the waterfront opposite and linked by an underpass, was also part of the contract. The Fullerton Singapore opened at the end of 1999 to rival Singapore's best hotels.

In Indonesia too, Dragages was busy with a residential project: the eleven tower Taman Rasuna development completed in 1997.

In Hong Kong it undertook two large-scale public housing contracts in Tseung Kwan O and Aldrich Bay as well as StarCrest, its first luxury residential contract for long term client Swire Properties, which was later followed by a further private residential development, Les Saisons.

Into the new millenium

Railway infrastructure had always been a major element of Dragages' experience, and in 1997, as leader of the EKD Joint Venture, it was awarded the contract for the design and construction of Kuala Lumpur's new Central Station, the nucleus of a new area of hotels, retail and offices titled Kuala Lumpur Sentral. Existing rail services passing through the site had to be maintained during construction, making the job highly complex.

In Hong Kong too it was occupied with rail projects: two tunnels for the new KCR West Rail, linking central Hong Kong to the north western New Territories (The 5.48km KCR West Rail Tai Lam Tunnel, and the 3.6km twin tube KCR West Rail Kwai Tsing Tunnels); and Hang Hau station for the MTRC Tseung Kwan O Extension.

An innovative Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM), at 8.75m the largest ever used in Hong Kong, and the first capable of working in mixed ground conditions, was proposed by Dragages as an alternative for the KCR West Rail Kwai Tsing Tunnels project. This avoided a cut-and-cover section proposed in the conforming design, and thus minimised the impact of the project in a busy area of Hong Kong.

On the building side it was also busy in Hong Kong with projects of a technical nature, including the new medical faculty for Hong Kong University, housing advanced research and teaching facilities; a new bus depot for KMB, where Dragages proposed an alternative design using pre-cast concrete construction instead of steel; and the fast-track construction of the new studio and headquarters complex for TVB.



2002: moving into a new Century for Dragages

By embracing the advantages of modern methods of construction and the use of cutting-edge technology, over the years Dragages has earned a reputation as an innovative force among Asia's construction leaders. Now as it celebrates its centenary and moves into the next 100 years of its presence in Asia, in the pioneering traditions of its founders, Dragages is committed to maintaining and developing its position in the industry, and to providing the services and solutions that will continue to gain the satisfaction and long-term confidence of its clients and partners.

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